

VZCZCXRO4746
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2343 2430822
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 310822Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4520
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002343

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2109

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: WASIT PROVINCIAL COUNCIL DISMISSES OPPOSITION
MEMBERS

REF: THIS IS A WASIT REPORTING CABLE

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Kevin Blackstone for Reason 1.4 (b and d
)

¶1. (SBU) The Wasit Provincial Council (PC) on Aug. 20 voted to permanently remove two leading "opposition" figures, Ghadanfar Kadim Ubayd (Iraqi List) and Majid Ali Askar (Dawa-Maliki faction). The PC Chairman, Mahmud Abd Al-Rida Talal (aka Haiji Mahmud-ISCI), initiated the removal process and obtained precisely the sixteen necessary votes in the 28-member chamber. The action appears to bring an end to a saga which began months ago when the two oppositionists filed a series of lawsuits claiming that the selection of both Wasit Governor Latif Tarfah and Mahmud was illegal and calling for their removal by the courts. During this time, Ghadanfar twice engaged Mahmud in fistfights in the PC's chambers, the two men were temporarily banned from PC meetings, and an ostensible reconciliation fell apart.

¶2. (SBU) Mahmud told Poloff that Ghadanfar and Ali Askar were removed pursuant to two sections of the Provincial Powers Act: Article 15.2 (the "Defamation" clause) and Article 8.7. The PC Chair explained that their behavior in chambers (a reference to the fisticuffs), "slanderous" remarks about the PC to media, and negligence (accepting public salaries while not actually performing any work) led to the sacking. Mahmud denied the dismissals were payback for the legal challenges, and said that the replacements would be chosen by Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) from the next runners up on the January 2009 election lists, i.e., the next top vote-getters on the Iraqi List and Dawa Party electoral lists. Mahmud added that he was sorry such a step was necessary, but that a majority of PC members agreed with the dismissals.

¶3. (SBU) Ghadanfar's view unsurprisingly differs from Mahmud's assessment. He told Poloff that the dismissal was political payback for challenging Mahmud and the Governor in court and refusing to back down (NOTE: five other members joined the original suit, but subsequently dropped off). Ghadanfar, who himself aspired to be PC Chair at one point, is the son of a prominent sheik and cousin of an influential Wasit CoR member. He said he would possibly pursue a reconciliation through tribal channels, but at the same time threatened additional lawsuits against the entire PC; subsequent to this conversation, he indeed filed suit in a federal administrative court. Ghadanfar also appealed to the PRT to intervene on his behalf, asserting that "the Americans are a part of the political situation in Iraq" and should intervene in the interests of democracy. Ali Askar, the Dawa Chairman in al-Kut, has been less vocal, possibly because he is under fire by critics within Dawa for poor handling of its election campaign and general ineffectiveness.

¶4. (SBU) Poloff also spoke with the Chairman of IHEC about the issue. The Chairman confirmed Mahmud's comments that the next runners up on the respective electoral lists would be selected for the PC if and when the court renders a decision. This might take some time, and the Chairman offered that if the oppositionists had powerful supporters, their dismissals might be overturned. However, this seems unlikely to happen,

though the cases may drag on for some time.

15. (C) COMMENT: Both Ghadanfar and Mahmud have good relations with the PRT and have proved willing to cooperate and partner with us in the past. Ghadanfar's chief allegations*that Latif does not have the legally-required educational credentials and that the ISCI-Sadrism coalition used questionable tactics to select the Governor*are Qused questionable tactics to select the Governor*are probably accurate. It is also probably true that Ghadanfar and Ali Askar are poor standard bearers for constitutional integrity. Their antics and demeanor do not help their cause, and despite the Governor's unpopularity, the two men appear to have limited public support. Haiji Mahmud is evolving into a skilled politician and increasingly testing the limits of the Provincial Council's constitutional authority. More so than the incompetent Latif, the PC Chair is now calling most of the shots politically in Wasit. END COMMENT.
HILL